Archivaria
The Journal of the Association of Canadian Archivists

# Convenient Fires and Floods and Impossible Archival Imaginaries

## Describing the Missing Records of Children's Institutions

NICOLA LAURENT, CATE O'NEILL, and KIRSTEN WRIGHT

*Archivaria* 94 (Fall/Winter 2022), pp. 94-119

---

# Convenient Fires and Floods and Impossible Archival Imaginaries

## Describing the Missing Records of Children's Institutions

NICOLA LAURENT, CATE O'NEILL, AND KIRSTEN WRIGHT

**ABSTRACT** This article concerns one notable feature of narratives around child welfare records: the prevalence of stories of records destroyed in natural disasters. These stories have the power to rouse strong emotions for people who grew up in institutional "care." Care Leavers, many of whom have a justifiable lack of trust in institutions and authority as a result of their childhood experiences, are skeptical about the supposed loss of their records in fires and floods. They remain suspicious that the records do exist but are being withheld to protect the reputations of the institutions. This article considers Gilliland and Caswell's notion of "archival imaginaries" in the context of missing, lost, or inaccessible child welfare records in Australia. The authors argue for an approach to describing these records that is not only person centred but also trauma-informed. The article presents two case studies that demonstrate the potential of applying this approach when describing records supposedly destroyed by fires and floods. Descriptions need to document the full story of the records, whether they materially exist or not, in a way that validates and acknowledges Care Leavers' strong feelings about records and demonstrates archival organizations' commitment to remediating the damage and hurt caused by past practices.

**RÉSUMÉ** Cet article concerne une caractéristique notable des récits entourant les dossiers de la protection de l'enfance : la prédominance des histoires de documents détruits à la suite de désastres naturels. Ces récits ont le pouvoir d'attiser des émotions fortes pour les personnes ayant grandi dans ces institutions de « soins ». Les personnes ayant quitté ces institutions – dont beaucoup ont un manque de confiance justifiable envers les institutions et l'autorité à la suite d'expériences vécues à l'enfance – sont sceptiques concernant la présumée perte de leurs documents à la suite de feux et d'inondations. Elles demeurent également méfiantes lorsque les documents existent bel et bien, mais quand leur accès est restreint pour protéger la réputation des institutions. Cet article utilise comme trame de fond la notion d'« imaginaires archivistiques » développée par Gilliland et Caswell dans le contexte de dossiers de protection de l'enfance en Australie qui sont disparus, perdus, ou inaccessibles. Les autrices plaident pour une approche de description de ces documents qui n'est pas uniquement centrée sur les personnes, mais également informée par les traumatismes. Cet article présente deux études de cas qui démontrent le potentiel d'application de cette approche lors de la description de documents soi-disant détruits par le feu ou lors d'inondations. Les descriptions doivent documenter l'histoire complète des archives, qu'elles existent matériellement ou non, d'une manière qui valide et reconnaît les sentiments des personnes qui ont quitté les institutions de « soins ». De plus, ces descriptions doivent démontrer l'engagement des organisations archivistiques afin de remédier aux dommages et blessures causés par les pratiques antérieures.

## Introduction

Person-centred archival praxis requires a shift in focus from working with records to working with individuals and communities. For archival organizations wishing to transform their practice to be more person centred, access is an obvious area to focus on, as it involves real encounters between people and records and between people and archival institutions. This article highlights a less conspicuous but crucial aspect of person-centred practice: archival description. Description is critical to the way people interact with archives; as Sutherland and Purcell point out, websites and finding aids are often the sites of people's first encounters with a repository's collections and other archival materials.[1]

Description projects that interrogate the language in the documentation of archival materials can be an ideal entry point for archival organizations wishing to shift toward a person-centred approach and to remediate past practices that have done harm or perpetuated marginalization and injustice. Description projects focusing on language – particularly, how the people in the records are described – are examples of person-centred practice that offer concrete and visible outcomes in the form of updated finding aids, records inventories, and web pages.[2]

Undertaking description projects to ensure that language is inclusive and respectful and that documentation meets community needs is an ideal way for archives to establish and build relationships with people and communities. In this article, we are calling for a broader conceptualization of person-centred

1 Tonia Sutherland and Alyssa Purcell, "A Weapon and a Tool: Decolonizing Description and Embracing Redescription as Liberatory Archival Praxis," *International Journal of Information, Diversity, & Inclusion* 5, no. 1 (2021): 60–78, https://doi.org/10.33137/ijidi.v5i1.34669.

2 Some examples of reparative description projects are Yale University Library Reparative Archival Description Working Group, "Reparative Archival Description Working Group: Home," Yale University Library Research Guides, accessed February 1, 2022, https://guides.library.yale.edu/c.php?g=1140330&p=8319098; Alicia Chilcott, Kirsty Fife, James Lowry, Jenny Moran, Arike Oke, Anna Sexton, and Jass Thethi, "Against Whitewashing: The Recent History of Anti-Racist Action in the British Archives Sector," *International Journal of Information, Diversity, & Inclusion* 5, no. 1 (2021): 33–59, https://doi.org/10.33137/ijidi.v5i1.34731; *Archives For Black Lives* in Philadelphia (A4BLiP), "Archives for Black Lives: Resources," *Archives For Black Lives* (blog), December 21, 2018, https://archivesforblacklives.wordpress.com/resources/; US National Archives and Records Administration, "Guiding Principles for Reparative Description at NARA," National Archives, January 11, 2022, https://www.archives.gov/research/reparative-description/principles; Emily Judd, "PUL's Inclusive Description Working Group Shares Progress on Effort to Describe Collections Accurately, Respectfully," Princeton University Library, accessed February 1, 2022, https://library.princeton.edu/news/general/2020-08-02/pul%E2%80%99s-inclusive-description-working-group-shares-progress-effort-describe.

description that encompasses all forms of descriptive metadata produced by archivists. Archivists need to be aware of and responsive to their audiences and users when describing records. In particular, their use of descriptive practices needs to be cognizant of the emotions of different people and/or communities and of how affect shapes the ways that people encounter, interpret, and feel about archival records.

Our thinking has been heavily informed by the work of Gilliland and Caswell and their notion of "archival imaginaries,"[3] which describes how archives and their stories are shaped by the interests, speculations, and feelings that users of the archive have about records – particularly when these records are closed to public access or otherwise inaccessible. Gilliland and Caswell's notion of the archival imaginary is not only a useful theoretical concept but also a potentially practical aid to archives and archivists wanting to shift toward person-centred praxis. In this article, we consider how archives can respond to archival imaginaries in their description and management of collections through two case studies of Australian child welfare records thought to have been impacted by natural disasters. We propose an approach to archival description that brings together person-centred and trauma-informed practice.

## Missing Records and Archival Imaginaries

This article focuses on a particular aspect of description work: addressing the records that are missing, lost, or otherwise absent from archival collections. Positivist conceptions of the archive, as well as common sense, mean that archives overwhelmingly focus on describing what they hold rather than what they do not. But in order to tell the totality of records' contextual stories, description needs to include information about the nonextant records as well as those held in an archive's collection. Including information about missing records and what is known about the circumstances behind their absence – be these accidental, negligent, or planned destruction or an unsolved mystery – makes archival documentation more comprehensive, providing a fuller understanding of the provenance and context of a collection. Archival description that addresses missing

3 Anne J. Gilliland and Michelle Caswell, "Records and Their Imaginaries: Imagining the Impossible, Making Possible the Imagined," *Archival Science* 16, no. 1 (2016): 53–75, https://doi.org/10.1007/s10502-015-9259-z.

records can also lead to affective outcomes by communicating to users that the organization values transparency, open communication, and honesty.

Empathetic, person-centred archival description needs to do more than document which records do and do not exist; importantly, it needs to address how people feel about records and how people's emotions affect the significance of records. Most crucially, person-centred archival description needs to acknowledge the affective weight of this "absence of desired documentation."[4] When undertaking descriptive work as a form of person-centred archival praxis, it is important to acknowledge that the absent or missing records may well be the records about which users have the most interest. To better meet the needs of users, it is important that archives provide transparent information about the gaps in archival collections and detail, as far as possible, the reasons why records cannot be found. The needs and understandings of the people documented in the records are foundational to person-centred description, especially when working with collections from people and communities whose rights and agency have long been ignored.[5]

We are proposing an approach where archivists create records descriptions that acknowledge that an archive's "story" is formed by factors beyond the material records. As Dever contends, people's emotions are "forces that shape archives";[6] understanding this is a necessary part of shifting toward person-centred archival practice. Archival imaginaries come into being out of a complex interplay between the way archival organizations document and represent records and the thoughts and feelings people have about these records. Emotions relating to missing, lost, or inaccessible records are particularly potent. Gilliland and Caswell explain that "for as long as they remain . . . inaccessible or their contents or very existence remain purely speculative, the records as imagined or anticipated can inspire all sorts of narratives, suppositions, aspirations, longings,

4 Gilliland and Caswell, 71.

5 Stacy Wood, Kathy Carbone, Marika Cifor, Anne Gilliland, and Ricardo Punzalan, "Mobilizing Records: Re-Framing Archival Description to Support Human Rights," *Archival Science*, no. 14 (2014): 397–419, https://doi.org/10.1007/s10502-014-9233-1; and Cataloging Lab, "List of Statements on Bias in Library and Archives Description," Cataloging Lab, accessed February 1, 2022, https://cataloginglab.org/list-of-statements-on-bias-in-library-and-archives-description/.

6 Maryanne Dever, "Greta Garbo's Foot, or, Sex, Socks and Letters," *Australian Feminist Studies* 25, no. 64 (2010): 164, https://doi.org/10.1080/08164641003762461.

fears and distrust."[7] These narratives and emotions are rarely acknowledged or included in standard archival descriptions; nevertheless, they exist and continue to circulate in other forums.

Straightforward examples of these imaginings are the breathless conjecture of literary critics about secret love letters in a manuscript collection, or journalists' eager anticipation of the release of embargoed cabinet papers (which, in Australia, are opened up by the National Archives every year on January 1, after a closure period of 20 years). Eadon explores the declassified John F. Kennedy assassination records as a demonstration of a collection of "high conspiratorial value" where "archival silences take on a particular weight."[8] Eadon describes the imaginings that are mapped before records are even released, as archival users create "doppelganger counterparts to the declassified records"[9] in online spaces like Reddit.

Unlike the JFK papers, the records with which we are concerned in this article – the official files relating to people who grew up in children's institutions – are of little interest to the broader public. Nevertheless, we argue that affective and imaginative processes very similar to those discussed by Gilliland and Caswell are at play. For many who are the subjects of records, particularly if the records document surveillance and control, mistrust of authority shapes their interactions with government bureaucracies and institutions.

## The Emotional Significance of Care Leaver Records

> As he looked for records about his life and family, Meyer was told different things by different departments. Some officials were good to him. Others clearly didn't care. One said his information had been lost in a flood. Another said it was a fire.[10]

7 Gilliland and Caswell, "Records and Their Imaginaries," 54–55.

8 Yvonne Eadon, "'Useful Information Turned into Something Useless': Archival Silences, Imagined Records, and Suspicion of Mediated Information in the JFK Assassination Collection," *InterActions: UCLA Journal of Education and Information Studies* 15, no. 2 (2019), https://doi.org/10.5070/D4152042683.

9 Eadon, n.p.

10 Christine Kenneally, "The Forgotten Ones," *The Monthly*, August 2012, https://www.themonthly.com.au/issue/2012/august/1354057131/christine-kenneally/forgotten-ones.

This article concerns one notable feature of narratives around child welfare records: the prevalence of stories of disastrous fires and floods. Too often, unsubstantiated stories of natural disasters such as fires or floods are used by record holders and archives to justify or explain absent records. These stories circulate formally – through information in records guides,[11] finding aids, and submissions to government inquiries, for example – as well as informally in the exchanges between archivists and Care Leavers[12] when they attempt to access their childhood records. These stories fuel both archival imaginaries and archival affect for Care Leavers. The emotions are complicated; the stories of the destroyed records prompt suspicions that the record-holding organizations are using natural disasters to withhold records from Care Leavers and cover up the truth. They also evoke wishes and expectations that the desired records must exist, somewhere.

The records of the institutions that offered out-of-home "care" are key to Care Leavers better understanding their identities, learning about their families, and getting context and information about their childhoods – including about why they were in "care" in the first place.[13] The vital importance of records for Care

11 Many of these guides were published after the release of the *Bringing Them Home* report in 1997. Additionally, these records guides are not traditional finding aids in the archival sense; instead, they provide a high-level survey and listing of records held by many different organizations, for example, all records held by Catholic organizations or all the records of relevance in a particular jurisdiction. See, for example, Department of Families, *Missing Pieces: Information to Assist Former Residents of Children's Institutions to Access Records* (Brisbane: Department of Families, Youth and Community Care Queensland, 2001), https://www.findandconnect.gov.au/ref/qld/objects/pdfs/QD0000282%20Queensland%20-%20Missing%20Pieces.pdf; Kristy Thinee, Tracy Bradford, and New South Wales Department of Community Services, *Connecting Kin: Guide to Records* (Sydney: New South Wales Department of Community Services, 1998), https://clan.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/connectkin_guide.pdf.

12 We are using the term *Care Leavers* to describe people who spent time in children's homes, orphanages, missions, and other forms of out-of-home "care" as children. In Australia, this includes members of the Stolen Generations, former child migrants, and Forgotten Australians. We recognize that this term is not preferred by all within these communities, and they may choose to identify by other terms, including *Care-Experienced*, *Wardies*, or *Homies*. Throughout this article, we have set the terms "care" and "home" in quotation marks to indicate that children often did not receive care and the institutions were not truly home.

13 Jacqueline Z. Wilson and Frank Golding, "Latent Scrutiny: Personal Archives as Perpetual Mementos of the Official Gaze," *Archival Science*, no. 16 (March 2016): 93–109, https://doi.org/10.1007/s10502-015-9255-3; Victoria Hoyle, Elizabeth Shepherd, Elizabeth Lomas, and Andrew Flinn, "Recordkeeping and the Life-Long Memory and Identity Needs of Care-Experienced Children and Young People," *Child & Family Social Work* 25, no. 4 (2020): 935–45, https://doi.org/10.1111/cfs.12778; Care Leavers Australasia Network, "CLAN Charter of Rights to Childhood Records," Care Leavers Australasia Network, October 19, 2020, https://clan.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/CLAN-Charter-Rights-Records-Rev-update.pdf.

Leavers, and the urgent need to remove access barriers, is an issue now widely recognized not only in Australia but also in countries including Canada, New Zealand, Ireland, and the United Kingdom.[14]

Care Leavers often have powerful emotions toward the institutions that failed them when they were vulnerable children. In the words of Leonie Sheedy,

> We state wards have remained hidden, forgotten and silenced. . . . The legacy of my time in "care" is emotional deprivation, institutionalisation, genealogical bewilderment, separation from my family, cultural and ethnic background, poor parenting skills, minimal education, incomplete family medical history, a sense of being of an underclass of society, and a feeling that we as state wards didn't matter to our own families, the government or the agencies who were responsible for our care and living constantly with a sense of insecurity.[15]

Given their adverse experiences as children in "care," many Care Leavers have a distrust or fear of authority and bureaucracy, and many are reluctant or even

14 See, for example, Shurlee Swain, Leonie Sheedy, and Cate O'Neill, "Responding to 'Forgotten Australians': Historians and the Legacy of Out-of-Home 'Care,'" *Journal of Australian Studies* 36, no. 1 (2012): 17–28, https://doi.org/10.1080/14443058.2011.646283; Jim Goddard, Suellen Murray, and Zachari Duncalf, "Access to Child-Care Records: A Comparative Analysis of UK and Australian Policy and Practice," *British Journal of Social Work* 43, no. 4 (2013): 759–74, https://doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bcs004; Michael Jones and Cate O'Neill, "Identity, Records and Archival Evidence: Exploring the Needs of Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants," *Archives and Records* 35, no. 2 (2014): 110–25, https://doi.org/10.1080/23257962.2014.951032; Cate O'Neill, Vlad Selakovic, and Rachel Tropea, "Access to Records for People Who Were in Out-of-Home Care: Moving beyond 'Third Dimension' Archival Practice," *Archives and Manuscripts* 40, no. 1 (2012): 29–41, https://doi.org/10.1080/01576895.2012.668841; Elizabeth Shepherd, Victoria Hoyle, Elizabeth Lomas, Andrew Flinn, and Anna Sexton, "Towards a Human-Centred Participatory Approach to Child Social Care Recordkeeping," *Archival Science*, no. 20 (April 15, 2020): 307–25, https://doi.org/10.1007/s10502-020-09338-9; Krista McCracken, "Community Archival Practice: Indigenous Grassroots Collaboration at the Shingwauk Residential Schools Centre," *American Archivist* 78, no. 1 (2015): 181–91, https://doi.org/10.17723/0360-9081.78.1.181; Heather MacNeil, Wendy Duff, Alicia Dotiwalla, and Karolina Zuchniak, "'If There Are No Records, There Is No Narrative': The Social Justice Impact of Records of Scottish Care-Leavers," *Archival Science* 18, no. 1 (2018): 1–28, https://doi.org/10.1007/s10502-017-9283-2; Belinda Battley, "Rights in Records for Children in Out-of-Home Care," *Archifacts*, no. 1–2 (2017): 21–40; Jane Wheatley, "'People Are Haemorrhaging Stories of Absolute Horror': Ireland's Baby Tragedy," *The Age*, March 12, 2021, https://www.theage.com.au/lifestyle/life-and-relationships/ireland-s-dark-baby-secret-i-was-told-no-one-will-ever-hear-it-20201203-p56kgf.html.

15 Leonie Sheedy, "Unfinished Business: Reflections on My Experiences of Being Raised as a State Ward of Victoria," (submission 33, Forgotten Australians inquiry, Senate Standing Committees on Community Affairs, Canberra, ACT, 2005), https://www.aph.gov.au/parliamentary_business/committees/senate/community_affairs/completed_inquiries/2004-07/inst_care/submissions/sublist.

unwilling to engage (or re-engage) with the same organizations responsible for them during their childhoods in order to request their records. It is unsurprising that these feelings of mistrust often extend to archival institutions and other organizations holding records about Care Leavers' childhoods (commonly, government departments and religious or charitable institutions). Nor is it difficult to appreciate just how vitally significant childhood records are for Care Leavers and how this can shape people's expectations about what is recorded in their files.

Valderhaug writes about the feelings that Care Leavers and other "individuals who approach the archives to find documentation of injustice committed against themselves" bring with them to archives:

> They approach us with their demands for justice, with their angst and their hopes, with their wants and their desires; they are coming to change their lives. The archives are strange to them; they know little about what may be found there, but they know that the archives are part of the same public system that some years ago neglected or mistreated them.[16]

Wilson and Golding are Care Leavers and academics who have written about their experiences of searching for and accessing their childhood records. They describe Care Leaver records as "mementoes of the official gaze," drawing parallels between the "child welfare" system in Australia and repressive, secretive, and surveilling state apparatuses.[17] These depictions can help archivists understand how Care Leavers might be feeling when they make contact to seek access to the archives. Archivists also need to think about how users encounter the archives before the moment when they make contact: through archival descriptions in finding aids, websites, and other publications. How might a Care Leaver be feeling when they arrive at the archives after a journey of many years of wondering and searching and imagining? What emotions might be associated with finding their childhood records? What might a person who spent years of their childhood in an institution expect to find in the records?

16 Gudmund Valderhaug, "Memory, Justice and the Public Record," *Archival Science* 11, no. 1–2 (2011): 21, https://doi.org/10.1007/s10502-010-9110-5.

17 Wilson and Golding, "Latent Scrutiny."

Records from Care Leavers' childhoods in orphanages, children's "homes," and other institutions are of huge personal significance in that they have the potential to solve mysteries about a person's bewildering and traumatic childhood and to validate personal narratives. In Australia, a series of government inquiries into the past treatment of children in institutions has allowed Care Leavers to express their feelings about being in "care."[18] Their testimonies can help archivists (and other people responsible for managing Care Leaver records) to understand how Care Leavers relate to and feel about their "care" records and the strong role played by affect, even (or perhaps even more) when records are absent.

Care Leaver Frank Golding has conceived of institutional archives as repositories of hope, "where we will find answers to questions that have nagged away at us, all the years of our adulthood."[19] However, as the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse has most recently noted, these records were not created with the children in mind; child welfare organizations never thought that the records they created were for anything but internal use. This extended to not seeing the need to keep detailed records on the children, particularly before the 1980s, when there were no legal or statutory obligations to create specific child welfare records.[20]

This has led to situations where Care Leavers know almost nothing about their families or childhoods, as one person described in their submission to the Australian Senate Inquiry into Children in Institutional Care (also known as the Forgotten Australians inquiry) in 2004:

18 Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, *Bringing Them Home: Report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families* (Sydney, NSW: Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 1997), https://humanrights.gov.au/our-work/bringing-them-home-report-1997; Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs, *Lost Innocents: Righting the Record – Report on Child Migration* (Canberra, ACT: Parliament of Australia, 2001), https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Community_Affairs/Completed_inquiries/1999-02/child_migrat/report/index; Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs, *Forgotten Australians: A Report on Australians Who Experienced Institutional or Out-of-Home Care as Children* (Canberra, ACT: Senate Community Affairs References Committee Secretariat, 2004), https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Community_Affairs/Completed_inquiries/2004-07/inst_care/report/index.

19 Frank Golding, "The Care Leaver's Perspective," *Archives and Manuscripts* 44, no. 3 (2016): 161 .

20 Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, *Final Report: Volume 8, Recordkeeping and Information Sharing* (Sydney, NSW: Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, 2017), 45, https://www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au/recordkeeping-and-information-sharing.

> You have nothing behind you. The big institution has been pulled down. It is as if you had never lived anywhere. . . . you have to have some roots somewhere. If you do not have your family of origin and you are trying to find them, you need something to go back to. It really is a weird situation.[21]

Unsurprisingly, the focus of work around Care Leaver records in Australia has thus far concentrated on improving access to records, in particular, interpreting legislation more compassionately and providing support so Care Leavers can feel safe and empowered.[22] However, the emphasis on records access has meant that other aspects of person-centred archival work, including description, have not been as well considered. Archival description that is insensitive to people's feelings about "their" records has the potential to cause harm; it can unrealistically raise expectations, cause confusion or suspicion, and make the act of getting access to records damaging and traumatic. One submitter to the Forgotten Australians inquiry described their experience:

> I looked forward with great anticipation to receiving those records, hoping that they would give me an insight into those four terrible years that my memory had successfully blocked out. But my hopes were in vain. My total records consisted of one line – who my parents were and the date of my admission to the orphanage.

21 Senate Community Affairs References Committee, "Children in Institutional Care" (public hearing transcript, Melbourne, November 11, 2003), CA46, https://www.aph.gov.au/~/media/wopapub/senate/senate/commttee/S7119_pdf.ashx.

22 Suellen Murray, *Supporting Adult Care-Leavers: International Good Practice* (Bristol: Policy Press, 2015); Department of Social Services, *Access to Records by Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants: Access Principles for Records Holders, Best Practice Guidelines in Providing Access to Records* (n.p.: Australian Government, Department of Social Services, 2015), https://www.dss.gov.au/families-and-children/programmes-services/family-relationships/find-and-connect-services-and-projects/access-to-records-by-forgotten-australians-and-former-child-migrants-access-principles-for-records-holders-best-practice-guidelines-in-providing-access.

> I sat down and cried my heart out. It was as though the emotional abuse of the orphanage was still continuing. As though Frank [brother] and I never existed. I was told by MacKillop Family Services that there were ample records for all other boys who were at the orphanage, however, as Frank and I were private admissions by our father, we only rated one line each.[23]

This story is a powerful demonstration of the emotions many Care Leavers have about their records and the devastating impact that accessing records can have for many people. If the documentation had been created in a person-centred, trauma-informed way, perhaps this person's experience would have been different.

Listening to Care Leavers' stories and understanding how they feel about their records can help archivists take a more tailored, person-centred approach to description. Furthermore, understanding why Care Leavers' childhood experiences make them an audience "prone to suspicion" is a vital starting point to addressing the silences in archival description. As Eadon contends, it is important for archivists to familiarize themselves with the archival users and audiences for collections in their custody, especially if they want to understand the roles played by affect and archival imaginaries.[24] As we will discuss in the following section, the common stories of fires and floods having destroyed Care Leaver records function like archival silences, in that they give rise to a situation "where the archive and its hoped-for contents are absent or forever unattainable."[25]

## Convenient Fires and Floods

> James Hacker: [reads memo] This file contains the complete set of papers, except for a number of secret documents, a few others which are part of still active files, some correspondence lost in the floods of 1967. . . . Was 1967 a particularly bad winter?

23 Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs, *Forgotten Australians*, 267.

24 Eadon, "'Useful Information Turned into Something Useless.'"

25 Gilliland and Caswell, "Records and Their Imaginaries," 61.

> Sir Humphrey Appleby: No, a marvellous winter. We lost no end of embarrassing files.[26]

Brilmyer et al. write about "how communities form imaginaries around the archives that represent them."[27] As the scene above from *Yes Minister* demonstrates, many people conceive of government archives as secretive, misleading, self-serving, and corrupted – in contrast to these institutions' own idealized representations of themselves as keepers of the nation's memories. The joke about the marvellous floods of 1967 shows how pervasive this attitude toward government bureaucracies is and illustrates the public's tendency to regard claims of records being accidentally destroyed with, at the very least, a grain of salt. The affective legacies of Care Leavers' childhood experiences, detailed above, amplify their cynicism toward state bureaucracies.

When applying for access to her records, Care Leaver Pamella Vernon was skeptical about the story she was told about a disastrous fire at her institution: "I believe that was generic. Being a part of CLAN [advocacy group Care Leavers Australasia Network] today, I know that was something a lot of people had been told." She gave evidence at a public hearing at a senate inquiry in 2004:

> A few months back we went and opened our files at Dalmar. Up until recently we were led to believe that they were burnt in a fire. About six years ago we got access to a few things from a file, where we saw letters – loving letters – our father had written that we never saw. We got a few reports and things like that, but it was said that everything else was destroyed by a fire in the walk-in safe. It would have been hard to ignite a fire there.[28]

Adoption advocacy group VANISH (Victorian Adoption Network for Information and Self Help) noted in its 2020 submission to an inquiry into historical

26 *Yes Minister*, season 3, episode 3, "The Skeleton in the Cupboard," directed by P. Whitmore, written by A. Jay and J. Lynn, aired November 25, 1982, on BBC Two.

27 Gracen Brilmyer, Joyce Gabiola, Jimmy Zavala, and Michelle Caswell, "Reciprocal Archival Imaginaries: The Shifting Boundaries of 'Community' in Community Archives," *Archivaria* 88 (Fall 2019): 10.

28 Senate Community Affairs References Committee, "Children in Institutional Care" (public hearing transcript, Parramatta, NSW, February 3, 2004), 15–16, https://www.aph.gov.au/~/media/wopapub/senate/senate/commttee/S7290_pdf.ashx.

forced adoptions that these stories are "so common that 'lost in a flood' or 'lost in a fire' are commonly seen by the adoption community as an automatic response by institutions as a way of fobbing them off."[29] People who are used to feeling dismissed, misled, and even abused by an organization are likely to feel the same way about that organization when approaching it years later to request access to their records. Careless and insensitive archival documentation only reinforces people's feelings about the institution holding the records.

Vague stories of past fires and floods have been seized upon by organizations holding institutional child welfare records to explain why they have so little to offer Care Leavers who come to them seeking access to their records. These stories are accepted at face value and get retold over and over again. The real stories of what has happened to these missing records are rarely discussed. In actuality, it is often the case that records were destroyed due to years of neglect (wilful or benign) or that records were destroyed legally using disposal instruments of the time. As CLAN stated in a submission from 2016, the true story behind the missing records is nearly always less spectacular than stories of disasters: "For many people it is because records have not been stored or maintained correctly and their files have been lost or destroyed over the years."[30] Additionally, the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse noted that record holders themselves did "not have up-to-date knowledge about the state or location of their older records or, indeed, whether they had even survived."[31] This points to a more systematic lack of care toward the records held, a lack of understanding of their importance until recently, and a lack of willingness on the part of record holders to be open about past practices.

There are many examples of child welfare records being destroyed throughout the 20th century, in line with accepted practice of the time or official policy or

29 VANISH Inc., "VANISH Submission: Inquiry into Historical Forced Adoptions," Parliament of Victoria, June 2020, 95, https://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/images/stories/committees/lsic-LA/Inquiry_into_Responses_to_Historical_Forced_Adoptions_in_Victoria_/Submissions/053_2020.06.18_-_Vanish_Inc_V2.pdf.

30 Care Leavers Australasia Network, "Consultation Paper, Records and Recordkeeping Practices," Submission to the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, accessed February 1, 2022, 13, https://www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au/sites/default/files/file-list/Consultation%20Paper%20-%20Records%20and%20recordkeeping%20Practices%20-%20Submission%20-%2013%20CLAN.pdf.

31 Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, *Recordkeeping and Information Sharing*, 44–45, 51.

records disposal instruments.[32] Marsh and Kinnane write about missing records, which they describe as "ghost files," from the Department of Indigenous Affairs in Western Australia. Their research examines the department's evidence of past destruction of records in accordance with archival disposal policies.[33] They contend that "by taking a closer look at the gaps and shadows in existing archives, we gain a better understanding of the archives as a whole."[34] Disposal schedules can be out of sync with archival users' assessments of records' significance and value. However, the least an archival organization can do is to properly document its reasons for destroying records and, crucially, to document exactly what was destroyed. In the course of their research into these archival silences, Marsh and Kinnane were able to use documentation from the State Records Office of Western Australia to generate a list of records that no longer survived – a valuable addition to the description of these records.

Unfortunately, as the royal commission noted, the problem of the destruction of important records about children is not confined to history. Despite various measures such as disposal freezes,[35] which came into effect in Australia from 1997, many have testified that they requested records in the 2010s, only to be informed that these records had been destroyed in the early 2000s under approved disposal instruments, public records legislation, and authorization from the relevant state archives authority.[36] Additionally, the royal commission received submissions from organizations stating that records they would otherwise produce had previously been destroyed in natural disasters. The final report gives as examples the destruction of records of both the Retta Dixon Home and the Queensland Child Protection Department, in 1974, in Darwin's Cyclone

32 See, for example, Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, *Bringing Them Home*, 282–83; Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs, *Lost Innocents*, 144; Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, *Recordkeeping and Information Sharing*, 49.

33 Lauren Marsh and Steve Kinnane, "Ghost Files: The Missing Files of the Department of Indigenous Affairs Archives," *Studies in Western Australian History*, no. 23 (2003): 111–27.

34 Marsh and Kinnane, 112.

35 See, for example, National Archives of Australia, "Disposal Freeze: Records Related to Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse," National Archives of Australia, accessed February 1, 2022, https://www.naa.gov.au/information-management/disposing-information/disposal-freezes-and-retention-notices/records-related-institutional-responses-child-sexual-abuse.

36 Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, *Recordkeeping and Information Sharing*, 54.

Tracy and the Brisbane floods[37] – extremely well-known Australian disasters. Notably, the royal commission accepted these explanations of records destruction without further interrogating the likelihood that these events destroyed the specific records mentioned in submissions. The royal commission and others have also discussed how issues of recordkeeping continue to affect children in the child welfare system today.[38]

Missing or destroyed files are a key part of the story of Australia's child welfare records – one that needs to be explicitly addressed in archival documentation. Organizations' explanations for missing records often fall short, referring to disasters with a lack of nuance or evidence and failing to include details about what information might have been in these destroyed records. The fact that many organizations holding records have troubling historical legacies as past providers of institutional "care," combined with poor transparency from these organizations about their records holdings generally, leads many Care Leavers to feel great suspicion and distrust and fuels the creation of impossible archival imaginaries. These imaginaries easily fill any silences and become "true" to many.

These tales of convenient fires and floods provide record holders and archivists with an opportunity to critically examine their existing archival documentation, to enact person-centred practice, and to make visible the actions of former and current archivists and record holders. We suggest that, in undertaking this nuanced descriptive work, bringing together trauma-informed practice with person-centred practice, as well as having an understanding of the impact of archival imaginaries, provides the best opportunity for archives to create descriptions that are considered, thoughtful, and most useful to the impacted communities.

As the case studies below demonstrate, telling the whole story of the records does not mean that Care Leavers will not experience powerful emotions. Indeed, learning the awful truth that their priceless records have certainly been destroyed can be extremely painful for Care Leavers. However, archivists should not have to shy away from affect in their archival descriptions or their communications with Care Leavers. Telling the story of the records in a way that is empathetic

37 Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, 53.

38 Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, 54; Frank Golding, Sue McKemmish, and Barbara Reed, "Towards Transformative Practice in Out of Home Care: Chartering Rights in Recordkeeping," *Archives and Manuscripts* 49, no. 3 (2021): 186–207, https://doi.org/10.1080/01576895.2021.1954041.

and appropriate to the community will help people to make sense of the records that do still exist.

In shifting attention from records to people, archivists can consider all aspects of people – including their needs and wants – and how to make the archives a safe and empowering place.[39] The concept of trauma-informed practice – and its five core principles of safety, trust and transparency, choice, collaboration, and empowerment – is useful to archives in that it highlights the power imbalances that exist in relationships between archives and users, especially users who have experienced complex trauma. A trauma-informed archival organization critically reflects on its past practices and is open and transparent about its new approach to description. The safety of all stakeholders, including archives users and archives staff, can be increased through the adoption of trauma-informed principles in relation to archival description. This means considering the positionalities of the people involved in developing the descriptions, their connections and relationships with the communities the records document, and protocols for accessing the records themselves and the descriptive information. It also means ensuring that all who are involved have time to process or come to terms with what they are reading in order to develop the description.

In the next section, we present case studies of two record-holding organizations that have adopted a person-centred and trauma-informed approach to revisiting their archival documentation of records thought to have been destroyed. Rather than reproducing stories of the fires, these organizations took the opportunity to interrogate the evidence and transform both their archival descriptions and their communications to the Care Leavers whose records are in their collections.

39 Trauma-informed practice is a strengths-based approach, recognizing the lifelong effects of complex trauma. See Maxine Harris and Roger D. Fallot, "Envisioning a Trauma-Informed Service System: A Vital Paradigm Shift," *New Directions for Mental Health Services* 2001, no. 89 (2001): 3–22, https://doi.org/10.1002/yd.23320018903; for examples of archival literature exploring trauma-informed practice, see Kirsten Thorpe and Cassandra Willis, "Aboriginal Histories in Australia Government Archives: Working with Records of Trauma," *Acid Free Magazine*, no. 10 (2019), https://www.laacollective.org/work/aboriginal-histories-in-australia-government-archives/; Nicola Laurent and Michaela Hart, "Building a Trauma-Informed Community of Practice," Education for Information 37, no. 1 (March 12, 2021): 27–32, https://doi.org/10.3233/EFI-190363; Kirsten Wright and Nicola Laurent, "Safety, Collaboration, and Empowerment: Trauma-Informed Archival Practice," *Archivaria* 91 (Spring/Summer 2021): 38–73; Katie Sloan, Jennifer Vanderfluit, and Jennifer Douglas, "Not 'Just My Problem to Handle': Emerging Themes on Secondary Trauma and Archivists," *Journal of Contemporary Archival Studies* 6, no. 1 (2019), https://elischolar.library.yale.edu/jcas/vol6/iss1/20.

## Case Study: Tally Ho Boys' Training Farm (1903–1986)

The Tally Ho Boys' Training Farm was a well-known children's "home" in Victoria, Australia, that accommodated thousands of boys over 80 years. However, the community services organization that succeeded Tally Ho, Uniting, had little documentation in its custody relating to the institution, its staff, and its residents. For many years, this paucity of records was explained by a frequently told story about a fire at Tally Ho. The destruction of client records by fire was noted in the Forgotten Australians inquiry[40] and repeated in subsequent newspaper articles.[41]

But this explanation only added to the imagined records, leading many former residents of Tally Ho to believe that records from their childhoods *must* exist. In the absence of personal files about children, in 2016, Uniting (then known as Wesley Mission Victoria) took steps to identify material relating to Tally Ho in other places in its collection, including administrative records, annual reports, and publicity and fundraising documents. The organization decided that, even if individuals' files could not be found, it would provide this contextual archival documentation about Tally Ho to former residents seeking access to their childhood records.

Uniting also undertook an investigation to find evidence in support of the long-held belief that fires were the reason no Tally Ho records were available. The research process established that there were indeed three well-documented fires at Tally Ho in 1958, 1964, and 1965. However, it also found that these fires did not result in any significant loss of residents' records.

To share this newly discovered information and evidence about the fires, Uniting created a page on its website, where it expressed deep regret that there was only minimal surviving documentation available for former Tally Ho residents. The page also detailed the three fires and explained that the 1958 fire resulted in a minimal loss of records and that it was likely that no records were lost in the two later fires, due to both the locations of those fires and the absence of records among the items listed as destroyed.[42]

40 Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs, *Forgotten Australians*, 264.

41 Dan Box, "Please Tell Me Who I Am," *The Australian*, March 6, 2014, https://www.theaustralian.com.au/news/inquirer/please-tell-me-who-i-am/news-story/be6df8ceaa79edf4b0ea8b63772cf31a.

42 Uniting (Victoria & Tasmania), "Records from Tally Ho, 1903–1986," accessed February 1, 2022, Uniting, https://www.unitingvictas.org.au/records-from-tally-ho-1903-1986/.

Recognizing that documenting the investigation is not enough to dispel belief in the imagined records, Uniting also shares its ongoing work to "fill the gaps" created by the lack of known records. Some work is internal, but all involves centring the former residents, their voices, and their need for records. Uniting is doing more description work to improve the visibility and discoverability of records about individual children in institutions. This work involves reviewing its legacy archival documentation to identify any mentions of residents in administrative records and updating Uniting's indexes so that this information can be shared with Care Leavers applying for their files. The organization is also working with the community on Creating Records from Memory, a project to interview former residents of Tally Ho and share their memories as oral histories.[43] Today, when former residents of Tally Ho approach Uniting, they are given the option to access these interviews as part of their records release process.

Uniting's close investigation of the circumstances surrounding the loss of Tally Ho records, and the subsequent documentation it has shared with the public, helps to provide a fuller context around the known and imagined records from Tally Ho and assists in building Care Leavers' trust in the record-holding organization. Uniting's continued work with former residents to supplement the records it does hold assists in a very practical way and continues to acknowledge the impact the lack of records has on former residents.

## Case Study: Kate Cocks Memorial Babies' Home (1954–1976)

The records of the Kate Cocks Memorial Babies' Home provide another example of person-centred archival description, which can reduce the need for an imagined archive of Care Leaver records. This case study discusses the investigation into the story of a fire that had destroyed records at Kate Cocks, a "home" for unmarried mothers and their babies in South Australia.

Like Tally Ho, Kate Cocks Memorial Babies' Home was an institution for which no admission records or personal files of residents could be located, and it was widely believed that the records had been destroyed in a fire. As with Tally Ho, the story of the fire was repeated in a government inquiry – in this

43 Nicola Laurent, "Records from Tally Ho (1903–2019)," Find & Connect, 2017, https://www.findandconnect.gov.au/ref/vic/biogs/E001049b.htm.

case, in the submission of the successor organization, Uniting Communities, to the Commonwealth Contribution to Former Forced Adoption Policies and Practices Inquiry: "Unfortunately no admission records have survived from the Kate Cocks Memorial Babies' Home. Most records were destroyed by a fire."[44]

Historians developing content for the Find & Connect web resource (a website about the history of children's institutions in Australia) were well aware of the depth of Care Leavers' feelings about these missing records and endeavoured to investigate the records of Kate Cocks Home to ascertain what records from Kate Cocks had been destroyed and what still existed. Their research confirmed that there had been a fire at the "home" in 1975 and uncovered photographic evidence in the Uniting Communities archives of the fire damage. However, the fire was only in residential parts of the "home" rather than in parts where records were located.

Further research in Uniting Communities' archives revealed the true circumstances behind the destruction of the records. Documentation showed that the Methodist Church had transferred children's records from Kate Cocks to the custody of the South Australian Department for Community Welfare in the late 1970s, after the closure of the "home" in 1976. Subsequently, these records were in fact destroyed by the government department, in line with the departmental policy at that time, which said that it was "improper for the Government to retain information for extended period about former clients."[45]

As a result of this research, the entry on the Find & Connect web resource was updated. The new entry attempts to tell the whole story of the records: it provides evidence of the fire, alludes to the stories about the fire having destroyed records, and then provides evidence of the real story behind the destruction of these records.

This case study demonstrates that description provides opportunities for record-holding organizations to deal with the traumatic legacy of institutional

44 UnitingCare Wesley Adelaide and Uniting Church of South Australia, "Joint Submission to the Commonwealth Contribution to Former Forced Adoption Policies and Practices 2011 Inquiry" (submission 376, Commonwealth Contribution to Former Forced Adoption Policies and Practices Inquiry, Senate Standing Committees on Community Affairs, Canberra, ACT, 2011), 2, https://www.aph.gov.au/parliamentary_business/committees/senate/community_affairs/completed_inquiries/2010-13/commcontribformerforcedadoption/submissions.

45 Karen George and Gary George, "Records of Kate Cocks Memorial Babies Home (1930s–1970s)," Find & Connect, modified July 2014, last modified February 12, 2019, https://www.findandconnect.gov.au/ref/sa/biogs/SE00754b.htm.

"care" and show their positionality today. The entry on Find & Connect refers to the immense value of children's records and expresses deep regret for the fact that this significance was not previously recognized by the "home" or by the department. This demonstrates how the attitudes of many past providers of institutional "care" have significantly shifted over time.

These two case studies show how sharing comprehensive information about the story of the records, even when the records no longer exist, can reduce the need for Care Leavers to rely on imagined records and provide a space for the positionality of the record holders to be visible. In both cases, there were known fires on the sites where the records were located, and it was only through careful investigation showing that the records were not in the same locations as the fires that the full story could be determined. This type of research and description offers an opportunity to reinvestigate and verify stories about convenient fires and floods; to acknowledge past injustices and neglect when it comes to recordkeeping; and to describe collections, including those where records no longer exist.

## Description of Missing Records in Practice

Undertaking description through a person-centred and trauma-informed lens enables us to expand our traditional archival documentation to acknowledge imagined records and the positionality of archives. It provides space to show how times and attitudes have changed since records were created, captured, originally described, and sometimes subsequently destroyed.

Record holders can improve transparency and trust in their organizations by creating publicly available documentation that includes information about vital records that are missing from their collections. Challenging and interrogating historic narratives of the loss of records, and investigating the evidence, are critical. When describing records said to have been lost in fires and floods, three areas in particular can be examined:

- whether the apparent disaster did, or could have, impacted where the records were stored;
- whether reports of damage included records; and
- if not, whether there is other evidence that the records were destroyed in a different way.

Taking a person-centred approach to description in practice is about prioritizing the needs of those communities documented in the records that do exist and those whose silences fill the archive. This approach has potential for describing many types of collections from different communities. Care Leaver records and stories of convenient fires and floods provide but one example of how missing or lost records can evoke mistrust and skepticism, particularly for marginalized people and communities. In the absence of a transparent, widely accessible explanation from the archives, imaginings about these unavailable records will thrive. Prioritizing people when describing records creates the opportunity for record holders to be transparent about how they operate and about their changing policies and decision-making processes over time. Records may have been "legitimately" destroyed in the past, but the organization can reassure the community that it now understands the significance of these records and will manage them with care.

Records destroyed in the past can be inferred and resurrected if archivists draw on resources like indexes and records destruction schedules. As Marsh and Kinnane found, it is often the case that "traces of these files have not been completely wiped from the record."[46] Whatever can be reconstructed should be properly documented, as should the research process, so that context and evidence are available for those who come later. The reasons a record no longer exists, whether these were disasters or disposal policies, need to be shared with the public. Being transparent about the process of uncovering the truth of the imagined records can help to restore or gain trust with the relevant community and can present opportunities for improved relationships and collaboration. As described in the Tally Ho case study, these can involve creating new records, with the voices of the community members helping to fill the gap in the official record, or including their voices in creating descriptions about collections that are transparent and meaningful to them.

As Gilliland and Caswell discuss, it is very difficult for an archive to refute imagined records;[47] and as Eadon notes, eliminating archival silences is actually impossible. Not even the most sensitive and person-centred archival description will remove the power of the archives to elevate some voices and silence others. Nor is it true to say that person-centred description will restore Care Leavers'

46 Marsh and Kinnane, "Ghost Files," 111.

47 Gilliland and Caswell, "Records and Their Imaginaries," 62.

trust in archives as institutions. Citing Eadon again, for some marginalized people and groups, there is no trust in government to be restored.[48] Imaginary archival narratives will endure, sometimes shaped by and sometimes completely independent of archival processes. Even if they are provided with as many answers as possible about what records do and do not still exist, Care Leavers will continue to have powerful emotional relationships with their records, real and imagined. Person-centred, transparent archival description may ameliorate some of Care Leavers' more painful feelings and wishful expectations about the existence of a complete repository that can answer all their questions. It may also create a space for archivists to express their own feelings and for record-holding organizations to acknowledge that past practices were not acceptable. To move to person-centred and trauma-informed practice, archivists must be willing for records descriptions to include the full story. Doing the work to verify apocryphal fires and floods provides one way for archivists to take responsibility for past injustices.

## Conclusion

This article proposes bringing together person-centred praxis, trauma-informed practice, and archival imaginaries to enable archives to fully and sensitively describe records that are missing, lost, or otherwise no longer part of the collections they hold. As we have discussed, these archival imaginaries can be potent sites of affect, particularly for those such as Care Leavers who are relying on these records to gain an understanding of their childhoods and family connections or to find evidence of past injustices. While this article has focused on the particular issues with Care Leaver records in Australia, we suggest these concepts have wider applicability, particularly for archives holding records of marginalized communities, who have little documentation to rely on, and where imagined records are rife.

Gilliland and Caswell argue for a change in practice that sees archivists explicitly acknowledging the powerful role played by "individual and collective imaginings about the absent or unattainable archive and its contents."[49]

48 Eadon, "'Useful Information Turned into Something Useless.'"

49 Gilliland and Caswell, "Records and Their Imaginaries," 54.

In 1990, Kaplan wrote that "the archive runs on a passion that is anything but public and which is rarely talked about," by archivists or by researchers.[50] At the time, "professional" researchers felt the need to come across as objective and studious, which often meant obscuring their feelings and motivations as passionate and hungry users of the archives. Kaplan mused about what might emerge if these "suppressed meta-archival narratives"[51] – the private and undocumented stories of the feelings and curiosities and passions that drive researchers (not to mention archivists) – were allowed to come to light. Today, writers are far more likely to include a discussion of these factors in written work that draws on archival sources. Researchers are encouraged to reflect on their practice and methodology and to disclose their positionality and consider how it shapes their work. It is less common to see explicit considerations of the positionality of archivists and how this might influence their practices.[52]

Duff and Harris discuss the impact of positionality on every aspect of archival practice, particularly description: "The power to describe is the power to make and remake records and to determine how they will be used and remade in the future. Each story we tell about our records, each description we compile, changes the meaning of the records and re-creates them."[53] Person-centred archival description needs to surface elements that have traditionally been excluded from description, including the many archival imaginaries that exist. This means also acknowledging the emotions and motivations of everyone associated with the archives and its records, including archivists, users of archives, and the people documented in the records.

The curious abundance of stories about fires and floods and subsequent efforts by archives to challenge and interrogate them are revealing in what they tell us about the shortcomings of past archival practice and how these have impacted people and communities. The lack of attention to the details, lack of interest in investigating further, lack of desire to look after records properly

50 Alice Yaeger Kaplan, "Working in the Archives," *Yale French Studies*, no. 77 (1990): 103–16, 103 https://doi.org/10.2307/2930149.

51 Kaplan, "Working in the Archives," 104.

52 Michelle Caswell, "Dusting for Fingerprints: Introducing Feminist Standpoint Appraisal," *Journal of Critical Library and Information Studies* 3, no. 2 (2021), https://doi.org/10.24242/jclis.v3i2.113.

53 Wendy M. Duff and Verne Harris, "Stories and Names: Archival Description as Narrating Records and Constructing Meanings," *Archival Science* 2, no. 3–4 (2002): 272, https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02435625.

over time – all have parallels with the absences experienced during a childhood in "care." In that sense, the affect experienced by Care Leavers in the face of absent records is arguably more important than the missing records themselves in that these feelings come from being lied to, mistreated, and misled throughout their childhoods.

Person-centred and trauma-informed description of lost and missing records can help to shape archives, both material and imagined, in ways that open up the possibility of new stories, new meanings, and new futures. As Hawkes points out, the archivist is a gatekeeper but also, potentially, "a gate opener,"[54] highlighting the process of archiving as a facilitator of storytelling and memory-keeping. When archivists are aware of archival imaginaries and are conscious of the emotions and aspirations of archive users, this opens up new possibilities for archival description to be a dynamic, collaborative, and iterative activity that responds to the changing needs of Care Leavers and other communities.

54 Martine Hawkes, *Archiving Loss: Holding Places for Difficult Memories* (London: Routledge, 2019), 109.

**BIOGRAPHY** Nicola Laurent (she/her) is the Senior Project Archivist on the Find & Connect web resource team at the University of Melbourne. Nicola advocates for trauma-informed archival practice, including the creation of resources and support networks to support its implementation and the promotion of sustainable access to online material through the preservation of links, and discusses the impact of vicarious trauma on archivists. Nicola is the International Council on Archives' New Professionals Programme Coordinator, the President of the Australian Society of Archivists, and co-founder of the Trauma-Informed Archives Community of Practice.

**BIOGRAPHY** Cate O'Neill (she/her) is a historian with a love of archives. Cate has been a member of the Find & Connect web resource team since the project's inception in 2011 and, since 2004, has worked on a number of projects to improve access to records for Care Leavers and members of the Stolen Generations. Cate strives to put community engagement and collaboration at the centre of her academic work and acknowledges how much she has learned from those who have been willing to share their lived experience with her.

**BIOGRAPHY** Kirsten Wright (she/her) is the Program Manager, Find & Connect web resource, University of Melbourne. Prior to this, she held a number of roles at Victoria University (Australia), including University Archivist, and also worked at the Public Record Office Victoria. She has previously published and presented on topics including archives and power, historical language and archival description, trauma-informed archival practice, and out-of-home care records. She is a co-founder of the Trauma-Informed Archives Community of Practice.